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SUBJECT: NCP NAMES A NEW BUREAU OF STATISTICS CHIEF THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE OF THE NATIONAL CENSUS

REF: (A) KHARTOUM 027

(B) 07 Khartoum 1971
(C) 07 Khartoum 1229

1.(U) SUMMARY: In a surprise move, on January 21 the NCP named a new Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) director, Dr. Yassin Abdeen, just three months before the national census is set to take place. The switch has the UN confused and particularly concerned that the appointment was made in an attempt to further delay and obstruct the census from moving forward. Census materials have begun to arrive in Khartoum, but the South still faces a lack of capacity and manpower to prepare for and execute the census. END SUMMARY.

A LAST MINUTE NCP SWITCH

¶2. (SBU) On 23 January, poloff met with UN Population Fund (UNFPA) technical advisor Herbert Kandeh to discuss the progress of the national census, scheduled for 15-30 April 2008. Kandeh was quick to divulge that the NCP had sacked the director of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Profesor Awad Hag Ali Ahmed, and replaced him with a new director, Dr. Yassin El-Hag Abdeen. Abdeen is the former manager of Faisal Islamic Bank, the National Electricity Corporation of Sudan, and Sudan Airways. He also worked at the Center for Future Studies, a Sudanese government-supported think tank in Khartoum (Note: CDA Fernandez spoke at the Center in December. End note). Kandeh described Abdeen's appointment as a "political move" and believes that the NCP feared Awad had become "soft" on the opposition ahead of the census. In response to this, the Presidency appointed Abdeen, who Kandeh described as extremely partisan, "tough" and "difficult." Dr. Abdeen was appointed CBS Director by presidential decree on 21 January.

¶3. (SBU) Kandeh expressed frustration at the appointment of a new CBS Director just three months in advance of the census. He fears that the new director, who is a physicist by trade and has no background in statistics, could significantly hamper and stall the census. According to Kandeh, Professor Awad will resume his Post as Vice Chancellor at the University of Khartoum. He described Awad as "stubborn and obstinate," but appreciated the fact that Awad took action on issues quickly. Kandeh said that UNFPA is waiting to see what impact Abdeen's appointment will have on the census.

DONORS HOLD BACK FUNDS

¶4. (SBU) Kandeh, expressed frustration with the European Union and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), both chief international donors for the census, for holding back USD 6 million in technical support. The donors have been disappointed with UNFPA's lack of spot-reporting on the progress of the census. They

also demand that UNFPA present them with a detailed six-month work plan for census activities. Kandeh said that a work plan will be discussed with the donors later this week. When released, the USD 6 million in funding will support the production of census advocacy materials, the training of census monitors, and will pay UNFPA technical staff salaries.

MATERIALS ARRIVE IN KHARTOUM

¶ 15. (SBU) Although census questionnaires are still being printed in the UK, 1500 questionnaires have arrived in Khartoum. Kandeh said that all remaining materials should arrive in Sudan within the next week. Census materials (questionnaires, training materials, etc.) are being air-shipped to Khartoum because of the strict timeline. The need to air freight the materials has cost donors an extra USD 4.5 million. It has been decided by the NCP and the SPLM that northern Sudan will receive 79 percent of the questionnaires and southern Sudan will receive 21 percent. Kandeh said the 79/21 distribution has become so "petty" that the North is insisting that all materials be split in those proportions, including the distribution of pencils. According to Kandeh, the South protested this for awhile, but backed down in the face of dealing with its own obstacles, such as behind-schedule mapping.

THE CENSUS AND DARFUR

¶ 16. (SBU) UNFPA figures show that field mapping is 95 percent complete in the South. Four unmapped counties remain in the Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Warrap. Mapping in the North is 100 percent complete with the exception of Darfur. Approximately 20 percent of all three Darfur states are not yet mapped. Kandeh said the unmapped areas (which include IDP camps) are inaccessible to government statistical staff for security reasons. Kandeh admitted

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that very little census advocacy was being done, especially in Darfur. He stated that tribal groups in Darfur will need to decide whether or not they wish to participate in the census. If these groups decide to participate, UNFPA, in coordination with these groups, will need to develop a plan for how to execute the census in the areas where government enumerators are not welcome. Kandeh also raised important questions about how the government in Khartoum will deal with unmapped areas in Darfur - will the NCP decide to allow the census to take place with incomplete mapping? If so, what are the implications of this decision for power-sharing?

¶ 17. (SBU) The Khartoum government has created a security team specifically designed to address security issues related to the census. According to Kandeh, this team is not worried about security issues in Darfur; it claims there are "no problems" there. Instead, the team is focused on potential problems in the South, especially in Jonglei and Southern Kordofan. The group maintains this posture even though the only major security incident that has occurred was the hijacking of two census vehicles in South Darfur in December.

WHICH WAY WILL HE GO?

¶ 18. (SBU) Two potentially troublesome issues that will fall in the hands of new CBS Director Abdeen are the release of remaining government census funds and the number of statistical centers in the North. USD 18 million in census funding was written into the 2008 GNU budget. The funds are meant to be used for census advocacy, warehousing of materials, and payment of enumerators. According to Kandeh, former CBS Director Awad believed that a large chunk of this funding was unnecessary and argued that funds only be used to pay enumerators. UNFPA strongly believes that the funds should be used as intended, especially in the area for advocacy. It will now be up to new Director Abdeen to determine the use of these funds.

¶ 19. (SBU) Former director Awad also fought for the establishment of six statistical centers in the North. UNFPA argues that the North should only have one center (as the South will have) in order to

avoid confusion in the merging of data. Kandeh also pointed out that more centers could lead to greater room for data manipulation. The number of centers in the North will also be determined by new Director Abdeen.

MONITORING

¶10. (SBU) The GNU has set up an NCP-led census monitoring and observation committee (MOC) that will report all information directly to the GNU. Individual monitoring groups will not be allowed to release press reports or statements on their own monitoring experiences. According to Kandeh, the EU is providing funds for observers. UNFPA's proposal, which has yet to be approved by the EU, allows for two monitors (one international, one local) per state to observe the process for a period of two months. According to Kandeh, the UN will also provide census monitors.

OBSTACLES IN THE SOUTH REMAIN

¶11. (U) Kandeh said that while the North has printed one-third of its enumeration area (EA) maps, the South has not yet begun printing its maps. Enumerators will need maps to conduct their work. According to Kandeh, there continues to be a general lack of capacity in the South, especially with regard to staffing. The Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation (SSCCSE) is considering bringing in up to 30 trained demographers from neighboring national census offices (principally Uganda and Kenya) to assist in printing maps and training enumerators. A total of 40,000 enumerators will be hired to carry out the census in the North. According to Kandeh, the CBS will second teachers to act as enumerators. The South is planning for a total of 10,000 enumerators but it is uncertain how the SSCCSE will obtain this staff. The first round of enumerator training is scheduled for late February in Juba and Khartoum.

¶12. (U) Kandeh said that Sudanese in refugee camps outside of Sudan will not be able to participate in the census unless they return to Sudan by the evening that the census takes place. He said that the UN-supported Radio Miraya, which has a large audience in the South, is advocating that refugees return to Sudan for the census (ref A).

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: The NCP's decision to replace the CBS chief just three months before the census is not surprising, especially given the NCP concern that the former director was not loyal. Former director Awad was known to be difficult and somewhat obstructionist

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to the census process, but our initial information indicates that newly-appointed director Abdeen may be even harder to work with. However, the most challenging obstacle to a successful census in April remains the lack of capacity and preparation in the South. END COMMENT.

FERNANDEZ